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A Melody of Leaves

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Finalist

Creative Non-fiction Category

2019 Emerging Writers Contest

A Melody of Leaves

12:40 am: one of the darkest hours of night. A time for a late night walk, a midnight snack, a good night's sleep, or if you're me, watching water boil. Though unbearably long to some, it's an event almost therapeutic to me. Swaying gently to the beat of Tchaikovsky's Waltz humming from our old radio, I behold the moonlight's shifting glow as it illuminates the shadows of our dimly lit kitchen, admiring each flicker between the trees as it highlights the collection of leaves and spices layered across the counter tops before reflecting off the frail glass mug that would soon hold a warm beverage to my delight. It is in this hour that I begin to brew my first cup of tea.

Tea? At this hour? Shouldn't you be in bed? To that I'd reply with a reluctant, "No." Though sleep is rather enjoyable activity, I find these moonlit hours kindred with a warm cup of tea bring a sense of serenity that enhances my inspiration in ways that cannot be found through closed eyes. On that particular night, I decided to create a blend of my own.

When the time was ripe, trying but failing to avoid singeing my skin, I pour the rumbling water over the collection of tea leaves. Immediately, the leaves bleed into the water, dissolving into a deep, robust maroon, releasing its rich, spicy aroma into the air, as it livens my senses one by one. Thin blankets of steam swirl around me before wrapping around me like that of a mother's embrace. From the very first sip, I feel the tension twisted deep within my mind begin to unwind; the subliminal worries that once clogged my thoughts flushed. I felt at peace, and it

all began with a single leaf—or rather a melody of leaves and spices I'd gathered from the forbidden cupboard of my mother's kitchen.

Tea brings the kind of peace that inspires me to tinker around on the piano, to doodle a poor representation of a tree, or to research an obscure concept that'd always boggled my mind. It's a kind of feeling I wish to share with everyone.

When a friend is down or ill, I think to console them with a blend of my herbal tea, with hopes it will help them as it has me. Though it's not much, it's quite wonderful seeing their faces brighten as I approach them carrying an extra thermos with me that morning. It became a regular occurrence to bring tea not only for the benefit of their health, but also for a good laugh over a warm beverage.

From that single blend of herbs, the pain and stress I'd carried for weeks had dispersed and I could finally think with a clear mind. It wasn't an artificial drug or therapy, it was a wholesome blend of cinnamon, cloves, ginger, leaves, and a dash of black pepper steeped in hot water. What stirred in me most was, how? I was anxious to know.

With a cup of tea beside me, the rest of that night instilled intense hours upon hours of research. I learned of tea's origins of medicinal use in ancient China, how it's not just its flavor that psychologically made me feel better, but its chemical make-up. It's the theanine within the leaf that reduces anxiety, regulating levels of serotonin and dopamine, restoring my health; the adenosine from caffeine that increases the central nervous system's activity, catalyzing my mind's inspiration. There was so much more to tea and herbs than I had ever anticipated. Several websites, articles, and intellectual YouTube videos later, my eyes were opened to the world of medicine and its natural holistic alternatives. Whether it originated from the caffeine in the tea or

from researching something that truly enthralled my mind, I felt something within me was moved.

After that night, I'd grown a new appreciation for tea. Its history opened my eyes to a field I never want to leave and a practice I'd like to spend the rest of my days being enlightened by. Like an herbal practitioner bringing tea to her friends and with a furthered education, I hope to one day be amongst those with the same desires to bring joy and wellness to others, and perhaps, a cup of tea or two.